

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 877

By Haynes

A RESOLUTION to honor and congratulate Ms. Kitty Wells on her exemplary career in country music.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pay tribute to those citizens who, through their extraordinary musical talents, have earned the universal respect and admiration of their peers and many fans; and

WHEREAS, throughout its illustrious history, Tennessee has been blessed with many exemplary citizens who have made significant contributions in the field of country music; and

WHEREAS, born Muriel Ellen Deason, Kitty Wells, "The Queen of Country Music," was born and raised in Nashville and has become a permanent part of country music and its rich heritage; and

WHEREAS, while growing up in Nashville during the Depression, Ms. Wells was blessed with a gifted musical family and sang gospel songs with her mother and her sisters around the kitchen table and at church; her father was a folksinger and her uncle was a country-dance fiddler; and

WHEREAS, after purchasing a radio in the 1930s, Kitty and her family would listen to the "Grand Ole Opry" every Saturday night; eventually they were able to attend the Opry, courtesy of the family's insurance agent; and

WHEREAS, by the mid-1930s, Kitty Wells had launched her own singing career, performing with her cousin, Bessie Choate as the "Deason Sisters". In 1936, the Deason Sisters made their radio debut on the Saturday afternoon WSIX show, "The Old Country Store," eventually they would have their own radio show; and

WHEREAS, by means of an introduction through her next-door neighbor, Ms. Wells met her husband in 1935. They started dating right after their first meeting and, two years later, Kitty Wells was joined in marriage with Johnnie Wright. Their blessed union produced three children, Bobby, Ruby, and Carol Sue; and

WHEREAS, Johnnie and his sister, Louise, joined the Deason Sisters on their radio show, billing themselves as "Johnnie Wright and the Harmony Girls," and they also performed on weekends at little theaters and schoolhouses in surrounding communities; and

WHEREAS, after the birth of the Wright's first child in 1939, Johnnie left the Harmony Girls and started performing with his brother-in-law, Jack Anglin, as "Johnnie & Jack". The duo eventually earned their own radio show on WSIX and became a popular act on several radio stations outside of Nashville, including Knoxville, Raleigh, North Carolina, and Charleston, South Carolina; their act featured Kitty as the "girl singer". It was at this time that the future Queen of Country Music took on the stage name, Kitty Wells; and

WHEREAS, in January of 1949, Kitty finally made her first record; she recorded four gospel songs and was backed up by her regular band, The Tennessee Mountain Boys; and

WHEREAS, the record did not receive sufficient distribution and Ms. Wells moved to Nashville after Johnnie & Jack received an invitation to perform on "The Grand Ole Opry"; and

WHEREAS, through a chance meeting her husband had while performing on "The Grand Ole Opry," Kitty Wells was given the opportunity to record her first hit single, which would propel her to her rightful place as country music's reigning matriarch; this country classic is, of course, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels"; and

WHEREAS, selling more than 800,000 copies, the song spent six weeks at the top of the country charts, went as high as number 27 on the *Billboard* pop chart, and was the first number

one song by a female country artist. The runaway success of the song earned Ms. Wells an invitation to sing on "The Grand Ole Opry," giving her the distinction of being the first female singing star on the show during the 1950s; and

WHEREAS, Kitty Wells placed 38 singles in the country Top 10 and placed a total of 84 singles on the charts; she also became the first female country artist to sell a million records and, from 1952-1965, she was voted as the nation's number one female country artist; and

WHEREAS, inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1976 and into the European Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999, Ms. Wells also received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 1991 Grammy Awards for the trail she blazed for women in country music; and

WHEREAS, during her illustrious career, Kitty Wells has become country music's first female superstar, serving as a prototype and opening the doors of Nashville's recording studios for future generations of women in country music; and

WHEREAS, her many awards and accomplishments aside, Ms. Wells remains most appreciative of the championship and support she receives from her loving husband and children, along with her devoted grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Kitty Wells and her husband, Johnnie Wright, still travel and perform some 100 dates per year, in addition to managing the Kitty Wells and Johnny Wright Family Country Junction; and

WHEREAS, we wish to take this golden opportunity to specially recognize one of Tennessee's most outstanding citizens and legendary country music artists; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we honor and congratulate Kitty Wells on her exemplary career in country music, salute her singular talents as an inspiring singer and musician and extend to her our best wishes for much continued success and happiness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.